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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7885
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RUYNAAAC/COMNAVFORJAPAN YOKOSUKA JA PRIORITY
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RUHBANB/OKINAWA FLD OFC US FORCES JAPAN CP BUTLER JA PRIORITY
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INFO RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 4240
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS - TOKYO

LEAD STORIES: Most Friday morning papers front-paged the Hamas victory in the Palestinian legislative election.

1. "Will Chances for Middle East Peace Emerge?" The moderate Tokyo Shimbun editorialized (1/27): "It appears that the radical Islamic group Hamas, which participated in Palestinian elections for the first time, has captured a majority of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Given that the will of the people has been expressed, a new approach to Middle East peace is desirable. The first Palestinian elections in 10 years brought a tectonic shift to the Palestinian government. Hamas appears to have defeated Fatah, the mainstream PLO group that had heretofore held the reins of power. Before the final results of the elections were made public, PM Qorei admitted defeat, and an atmosphere of revolution was prevalent.... Nevertheless, the armed struggle continues and peace negotiations are at a standstill, as Israel maintains a hard-line policy toward the Palestinians while Hamas and others respond with terrorism.

2. "Criticism had grown among the Palestinians over the corruption during the long years of the Fatah government. Since the death of then-leader Arafat two years ago, popular discontent has been increasingly directed toward the Abbas government.... The election is expected to result in the birth of a fractious coalition government, though it is possible that Hamas will win outright.... Israel has dismissed the political softening of Hamas and refused to negotiate with it. The US and Europe, meanwhile, continue to insist on the disarmament of Hamas first. As long as Israel persists in using force, it is clear that Hamas will reject this call.... Now that the framework of 'Arafat-Sharon' hostility has collapsed,

making the Israeli and Palestinian political situations more fluid, it is a good chance to take a new approach to facilitating stability in the Middle East."

SCHIEFFER